

The Sydney Morning Herald

Legal brothels linked to international sex trafficking rings

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LEGAL brothels in NSW and Victoria are operating unchecked despite police investigations implicating them in human trafficking, sex slavery and organised crime.

Two federal police investigations, Operations Elixation and Raspberry, have identified at least two Sydney brothels and three Melbourne ones linked to an international human trafficking and sex slavery ring. The syndicate allegedly convinces Asian women to come to Australia to study. They are then forced to work as sex slaves in brothels.



Lin Gao ... the licensed manager of Candy Club.

But the state and local authorities responsible for approving legal brothels have taken no action, despite court documents in August detailing federal police allegations of the brothels' - or their managers' - involvement in organised crime.

A joint investigation by the *Herald* and the ABC program *Four Corners* can reveal that the brothels include the Five Star in Woolloomooloo, which was approved by the City of Sydney, and the Candy Club in Melbourne, licensed by the Victorian government.

A syndicate member, De Jun Zheng, was also involved in the killing in 2009 of a Melbourne man, Abraham Papo, outside a brothel linked to sex trafficking.

Evidence suggests Papo was killed trying to help a Korean prostitute he thought was being harmed or held against her will by the syndicate in Sydney. Papo's parents, Deanna and Marco, are calling on state and federal authorities to crack down on brothels linked to sex trafficking.

In addition to the legal parlours identified in federal police operations, the *Herald* can reveal other legal brothels operating unchecked despite alleged links to organised crime. They are:

Nadira in inner-city Sydney, which specialises in Korean prostitutes. It is closely linked to the Comanchero outlaw motorcycle club and senior Asian organised crime figures;

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/legal-brothels-linked-to-international-sex-trafficking-rings-20111009-1lfxs.html>

Regarding House, in Heidelberg, Melbourne, where a sex slave allegedly worked in 2009. The owner of the premises is linked to a Chinese syndicate that runs illegal brothels;

39 Tope Street in South Melbourne, from which authorities removed two women in late 2008 due to sex slavery allegations which the licensee later denied;

Senior police sources said the links between organised crime or sex trafficking syndicates and legal brothels highlighted the need for stronger state regulation, better information-sharing between police and regulators - including across

state borders - and discussion of the need for uniform prostitution laws in Australia.

An federal police spokesman told the *Herald* the agency "continually explores ways to increase the sharing of information and collaboration" in the illegal sex industry.

Since 2003, the federal police's human trafficking teams have undertaken more than 308 investigations and assessments of trafficking allegations, identifying 181 victims, including 147 women forced to work as sex slaves.

Senior state police sources in NSW and Victoria acknowledge that the policing of organised crime in the legal brothel sector is patchy and the regulation of brothels in both states often woeful.

Operation Raspberry has gathered testimony from two witnesses who allege that Lin Gao, the licensed manager of Candy Club, is part of a syndicate which in 2009 forced two women to work as sex slaves at Five Star in Woolloomooloo and at a second Sydney brothel, which is under new ownership, and at two other Melbourne brothels.

In witness statements to a Melbourne court hearing in August, two Chinese women alleged they were forced to engage in unsafe sex practices in these legal brothels and work up to seven days a week, servicing dozens of men. Every dollar they earned was allegedly returned to the syndicate that sent them from Asia to Australia.

"I did not know how much money I made or how much money I had paid off my debt. My mind was blank. I was just counting down the days," one alleges.

The statements identify Ms Gao as an alleged "big shareholder" and decision-maker connected to the trafficking syndicate's Australian operations, although she told the *Herald* through a lawyer that she was not involved in any impropriety.

The federal police court documents contain a large amount of information implicating Ms Gao and several of her Sydney and Melbourne associates in sex trafficking or other crimes, but only one syndicate member has been charged. At least three of these associates are still involved in running legal brothels in Sydney or Melbourne.

In NSW brothels are regulated by local councils under planning laws.

The City of Sydney's acting manager of the safe cities unit, Rebecca Martin, said issues of organised crime were beyond the scope of council officers, whose role was only to ensure brothels complied with their development consents.

"If we have any concerns about the treatment of sex workers, or illegal activity or immigration issues, we refer them to the NSW Police," she said. "We work closely with the local area command."

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/legal-brothels-linked-to-international-sex-trafficking-rings-20111009-1lfxs.html#ixzz1aKCzpfV0>